

**STATE OF ALASKA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY**



**FAIRBANKS AREA FORESTRY
PRELIMINARY BEST INTEREST FINDING AND
DECISION FOR
ANDERSON WEST
ADL# 420368**

2/25/2015

I. PROPOSED ACTION

The Division of Forestry (DOF) is proposing to offer for sale approximately 350 acres of white spruce, birch, and aspen sawtimber and fuelwood from state lands approximately 75 miles southwest of Fairbanks and west of the Nenana River. The volume to be offered totals approximately 6.8 million board feet or 2.1 million cubic feet. DOF would sell the timber as a competitive bid negotiated sales for commercial and personal use. For this area, a Draft FLUP for NC-1403-F, Anderson Spruce #1, is being issued for review concurrently with this PBIF.

The management objectives for the proposed timber sales are:

- Harvest the commercial sawtimber and fuelwood before more significant decrease in vigor occurs.
- Return the harvested sites to back to young productive timber stands.
- Provide locally harvested timber products for both the local and state economy.
- Provide access to firewood for residential heating needs of the nearby communities of Healy and Nenana.
- Provide access for future commercial timber sales for the Fairbanks Management Area.

II. STATUTORY AND REGULATORY AUTHORITY

The Division is taking this action under the authority of

- AS 38.05.035(e) Best Interest Finding;
- AS 38.05.110-120 and 11 AAC 71, Timber Sale Statutes and Regulations; and
- AS 41.17.010-950 and 11 AAC 95 Forest Resources and Practices Statutes and Regulations.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

The Division will maintain an administrative record regarding the decision of whether or not to proceed with the action as proposed. This record will be maintained at the DOF's Fairbanks Area Office filed as ADL-420368.

IV. SCOPE OF DECISION

This preliminary best interest finding (PBIF) is the first part of step three of a six-step process to design, sell, and administer timber sales.. The following list summarizes the overall process:

Step 1: Regional planning. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) develops area plans and state forest management plans to designate appropriate uses for state land, classify the land accordingly, and establish management guidelines for multiple use. These plans determine where timber sales are an allowed use, and what other uses must be considered when designing and implementing sales. Subsequent land use decisions must be consistent with the area plans. The area in this PBIF is covered by the Yukon Tanana Area Plan as unit #P-48. The finding also considers the Denali Borough Code and the Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan.

Step 2: Five-year Schedule of Timber Sales (AS 38.05.113). The Fairbanks Area Office prepares a Five-year Schedule of Timber Sales every other year. The Schedule identifies proposed sales, in-

cluding their location, volume, and main access routes. The Five-year Schedules are scoping documents that provide an opportunity for public, agency, and industry to identify potential issues and areas of interest for further consideration in the best interest finding and Forest Land Use Plan. A proposed timber sale must appear in at least one of the two Five-year Schedules preceding the sale.

Step 3: Best Interest Finding. A best interest finding is the decision document that:

- Establishes the overall area within which the timber sale may occur,
- Determines the amount of timber that will be offered for sale and the duration of the sale,
- Sets the overall harvest and reforestation strategy for the sale area,
- Determines whether the sale proposal complies with the Constitutional requirement to manage for sustained yield by evaluating the amount of timber in the sale and the annual allowable cut for the affected area,
- Selects the appropriate method of sale (i.e., competitive or negotiated sale), and
- Determines the appraisal method that will be used to determine the sale price.

The Preliminary Best Interest Finding (PBIF) is intended to provide sufficient information for reviewers to ensure that the best interest of the State will be served by the proposed action.

After public and agency review of the PBIF, DOF reviews comments, makes changes as appropriate, and issues a final best interest finding (BIF). DOF must adopt a final BIF before selling timber. A person affected by the final decision who provided timely written comment or public hearing testimony on the preliminary decision may appeal it, in accordance with 11 AAC 02.

Step 4: Forest Land Use Plans (AS 38.05.112). Prior to authorizing harvest of timber on any area greater than 10 acres, the DOF must adopt a site-specific Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) for the harvest area. DOF will prepare FLUPS for harvest areas within the overall sale area covered by this best interest finding. FLUPs specify the site, size, timing, and harvest methods for harvest unit within the sale area. FLUPs also address site-specific requirements for access construction and maintenance, reforestation, and multiple use management. Draft FLUPs will be based on additional field work, agency and community consultation, and site-specific analyses by the DOF, and will be subject to public and agency review.

Step 5: Timber sales and contracts. Following adoption of the final best interest finding, and completion of the FLUPs, DOF will offer the timber for sale by auctioning competitive sales and/or negotiating some sales with purchasers. The Division will sign a contract with the winning bidder for each sale. The contract will include stipulations to ensure compliance with the best interest finding, FLUP, and statutory requirements.

Step 6: Sale administration. DOF administers timber sales and conducts field inspections to ensure compliance with the final best interest finding, FLUP, timber sale contract, and applicable laws, including the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act and regulations (AS 41.17 and 11 AAC 95), and forest management statutes and regulations in AS 38.05 and 11 AAC 71.

V. PROJECT LOCATION, LAND STATUS, AND DESCRIPTION

A. Location

This BIF covers approximately 350 acres of State land within State owned lands designated Forest Classified. The harvest area and proposed access are located within: Sections 14, 23, 26, and 35 of Township 7 South, Range 9 West, Fairbanks Meridian, and Sections 25 and 36 of Town-

ship 6 South, Range 9 West, Fairbanks Meridian. The area is found on USGS quads Fairbanks C-4 (see attached maps).

B. Title status

The timber harvest area is designated forest classified on General Selection land within one township. There are no title restrictions on the parcels proposed for harvest. The acquisition authority and land classification are as follows;

Township, Range, Meridian	Acquisition Authority	Classification Order	Land Use Plan
T 6 S, R 9 W, F	GS-428	NC-81-004	YTAP
T 7 S, R 9 W, F	GS-431	NC-81-004	YTAP

C. Land use planning, classification, and management intent

The proposed area is within the Yukon Tanana Area Plan in the unit# P-48. There are no specific restrictions stated in the area plan that are applicable to this proposed project. Guidelines for special management zones do apply for the Nenana River including side channels, sloughs, and backwaters. The area is accessed using all season primary, secondary forest, and winter roads. The proposed harvest units are designed to be consistent with the intent of the plan.

The Interagency Fire Management Plan includes these lands in the “Full” protection category.

D. Current access and land use:

The proposed area can be accessed from the south via the Kobe Ag Road from mile 275 Parks Highway. Additional winter road segments would need to be constructed to access individual sale units. To the north, proposed winter access, via the Anderson Road and Festival Drive, would be constructed to cross the sloughs and main channel of the river to access harvest units. The land covered by this PBIF is managed by the Department of Natural Resources as a ‘working forest’ consistent with the constitutional mandate to encourage the use and development of the state’s resources.

Farther north, but still within unit# P-48, the DOF manages active timber harvests along the Nenana River floodplain. Historic uses of the land in the general area have included logging, hunting, trapping, and general trail use. The current uses of the area are recreation, wood cutting, hunting and trapping.

E. Background and description of proposal

1. **Background:** Meeting the higher demand for both sawtimber and fuel wood in the interior continues to be a priority for the DOF. In unit# P-48 of the YTAP, commercially viable stands, which would require relatively little secondary winter road construction for access, have been identified and ground truthed. Following the identification of individual harvest units, DOF reviewed existing land use plans, considered markets for the tim-

ber, and designed this proposal to harvest the timber with respect to the intent of the TVSF management plan while protecting the fish, wildlife, and water resources, and avoiding impacts to local access, recreation uses and archaeological sites.

2. Timber volume and sustained yield: The proposed project area has an estimated volume of 6.8 million board feet or 2.1 million cubic feet of white spruce and balsam poplar saw and pole class timber on approximately 350 acres of land. The Fairbanks Area Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) is calculated at approximately 4,606 acres of harvest annually. This action alone and in combination with other timber sales that are sold will be within the allowable cut and comply with sustained yield requirements.
3. Harvest unit design: Unit sizes are anticipated to range between 10 and 150 acres. Clearcuts and heavy partial cuts will be utilized to harvest the timber volumes proposed in the FLUPS. Sale unit boundaries will be located along naturally occurring vegetative type changes and flow channels within identified area. A 100 foot buffer will be maintained along sloughs and channels with the intent to maintain a short and long term source of large woody debris as well as comply with Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act.
 - a. Reforestation and site preparation: The sale area will be reforested in compliance with the Forest Resources and Practices regulations (11 AAC 95.375-.390). Mechanized crushing of vegetation during normal mechanical logging activities should be adequate to prepare a useable mineral soil seed bed, however additional scarification is proposed in any birch harvests. Under this harvest system, natural regeneration of hardwoods should be increased due to increased light and soil temperatures. Birch and aspen, either as residuals from within the unit or adjacent trees outside of the unit, will provide abundant seed. Additionally, mechanical crushing stimulates re-sprouting of trees and shrubs. White spruce will also provide a seed source. A regeneration survey will be conducted three years after any harvest. If the survey indicates inadequately stocked areas greater than 0.5 acres or totaling 35 acres, then hand planting of white spruce seedlings will be performed on non-stocked areas. The goal for regeneration is to achieve a minimum of 450 stems per acre of mixed species.
 - b. Access design and construction: Access design, construction, and maintenance will comply with the Forest Resources and Practices regulations (11 AAC 95.285-.355).
 - Access to the southern harvest units will be via the Kobe Ag Road from mile 275 Parks Highway. From that point additional winter road segments would need to be constructed to access individual sale units. To the north, proposed winter access, via the Anderson Road and Festival Drive, would be constructed to cross the sloughs and main channel of the river to access harvest units.
 - Riparian buffers will be maintained along roads and any harvests in the proposed area. Any slough crossing will be done so using an ice bridge with specifics for construction and any required permits to be included in the road contract. The crossing is anticipated to require a Fish Habitat Permit for a winter stream crossing (AS 16.05.871 (b)).
 - Any secondary winter roads or spurs will be inactive and not maintained following harvest activities.

- Generally DOF applies for public easement right of ways for its long-term routes; these proposed winter roads would not qualify as one of these long term routes.
- c. Appraisal method: Commercial sales will be based on transactional evidence and market demand and DOF will apply a value for those products. DOF will appraise the timber value in compliance with 11 AAC 71.092.

F. Resources and management

1. Timber

- a. Timber stand composition and structure: The stands to be harvested consist of fully mature white spruce, birch, aspen and balsam poplar in both mixed and pure compositions.
 - b. Stand silvics: Merchantable tree species here in the Tanana Valley generally include white spruce, aspen, balsam poplar and birch. Silvicultural harvest systems that facilitate even-aged (natural) management are generally preferred. They mimic the ecological impact of wildfire and other disturbances and result in the greatest increase in site productivity. Even-aged management is normally accomplished through clear-cuts, patch cuts, and heavy partial cuts which open up the site to maximum solar gain. Even-aged management techniques are utilized to provide young, vigorously growing stands in contrast to older, undisturbed stands. Such placement of harvest units can optimize natural seedling and the edge effect.
 - c. Topography and Soils: The area consists of lowland, floodplain sites between 400-600 foot elevations and is generally flat. The proposed sale will be designed and managed to prevent significant impairment of the land and water with respect to renewable resources (AS 41.17.060(c)(5)).
2. Agriculture. There is some agriculture activity south of the harvest area but activities associated with the sale units are not expected to affect these agricultural uses.
3. Wildlife habitat and harvest. Wildlife typical of the interior are found here and during ground reconnaissance game trails were observed through out the proposed area. This unit has been identified in the YTAP as heavily used for range (moose). There are no identified raptor nests within the proposed sale area.
4. Fish Habitat, water resources, and water quality. The Nenana River and Lost Slough are anadromous, however, the proposed sale will be designed and managed to protect fish habitat and water quality in compliance with the Forest Resources and Practices Act and regulations (AS 41.17 and 11 AAC 95) .
5. Recreation, tourism, and scenic resources. Recreational use of the area is high given its proximity to the Parks Hwy and neighboring communities. In addition, there are three identified RS2477 trails located south of the proposed harvest area. These are not expected to be impacted by harvest operations. Where trail use utilizes existing winter roads needed for access, sufficient snow cover will be left on the roads to enable continued winter recreational use. Cross trails will be kept free of either snow filled or brush filled berms.

6. Cultural Resources. DOF works with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to identify and avoid known cultural, historic or prehistoric sites in planning the proposed access routes and salvage areas. If additional archaeological sites are identified, proposed salvage areas and road locations will be appropriately adjusted to avoid conflicts. If any historic or archaeological sites are encountered during road construction or harvest activities, DOF will immediately inform SHPO and take action to protect the findings.
7. Subsurface Resources. There are no anticipated effects on any mining, oil or gas activity.

G. Costs and benefits

In addition to generating royalties to the State's general fund, the proposed sale will create economic benefits to the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the Denali Borough, the community of Nenana, and to other locations in Alaska. The business community will receive direct economic benefits from providing support services for the operators through sales of fuel, food, housing, medical and miscellaneous supplies. The sale is expected to benefit the local economy by providing jobs. The residents of the Borough will receive an indirect benefit through taxes paid to cities and the Borough by the operator and employees during the course of the timber harvest operation.

The sale is expected to benefit the local economy by providing jobs. It will have a positive impact on local employment by generating significant man-hours of work associated with the harvest and transportation of wood products from this sale. Additionally the public may benefit from access to additional personal use fuel wood areas.

VI. PUBLIC REVIEW

The public and agencies are invited to comment on this Proposed Best Interest Finding. Objections or comments pertaining to the proposed action must be received in writing by the DOF Fairbanks Area Office **by 4/13/2015** in order to ensure consideration for review. Comments should be mailed to the State of Alaska, Division of Forestry, 3700 Airport Way Fairbanks, Alaska 99709, or by email to kevin.meany@alaska.gov. For more information you may contact the Fairbanks Area Forester (acting) Paul Maki at 907-451-2601 or Kevin Meany at 907-451-2602.

VII. PUBLIC NOTICE

The PBIF was publicly noticed in compliance with AS 38.05.945. Notice was posted on the Alaska Online Public Notice System (<http://aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/>) and the Forestry Timber website (<http://forestry.alaska.gov/timber/fairbanks.htm#flup>).

VIII. ALTERNATIVES AND DISCUSSION

There are 4 possible alternatives to consider for this project area. A discussion of each of the alternatives follows. All alternatives are consistent with the area plan and applicable statutes and regulations.

A. Conduct the project as proposed:

This alternative meets the objectives of the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and DNR'S constitutional mandate. It also meets the silvicultural objective of improving forest vigor, provides for a value-added end product and creates additional jobs in Alaska due to the combination of road building, log-

ging, and trucking. This alternative also complies with the management objectives of the TVSF Management Plan for Unit 5A.

B. Modify the project by making it smaller or larger:

The proposed area is a logical setting for typical commercial timber sales in Interior Alaska. The size of the sales will be designed to be large enough to be economically viable considering access development and mobilization costs and distance to processing facilities. Sales of this size are appropriately balanced to maintain other resource values as well as provide economic benefits to the Tanana Valley.

C. Defer the project to a later date:

Deferring harvests in the proposed area to a later date would fail to meet many of the objectives of the sale program. One of the main objectives is to make State-owned timber consistently available to the timber industry.

D. Cancel the project:

This alternative would result in not meeting any of the objectives outlined for this management action. Utilization of the forest resource would not be achieved. There would be no significant contribution to the State and local economies. This alternative would delay the management objectives planned for the area, deny making a source of raw materials available to the local wood products industry, and would delay the harvest of mature trees, prior to the onset of disease or insect infestation.

IX. RECOMMENDATION AND PRELIMINARY DECISION

After due consideration of all pertinent information and alternatives, the DNR has reached the following Preliminary Decision: To offer for sale approximately 350 acres of white spruce, birch, and aspen to provide sawtimber and fuelwood as proposed in **Alternative A** and described in this PBIF. The DOF finds that this preliminary decision satisfies the objectives stated in this document and it is in the best interest of the State to proceed with this action under its authority of AS 38.05.035(e) (Powers and Duties of the Director) & AS 38.05.110-120; 11 AAC 71 (Timber Sale Statutes and Regulations).

A person is eligible to participate in any appeal or request for reconsideration to the final finding if s/he has submitted comment to the preliminary finding and decision during the comment period.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Maki, Fairbanks Area Forester (acting) at paul.maki@alaska.gov or 907-451-2601.

X. SIGNATURE

Fairbanks Area Forester
Alaska Division of Forestry

Date

XI. ATTACHMENTS

